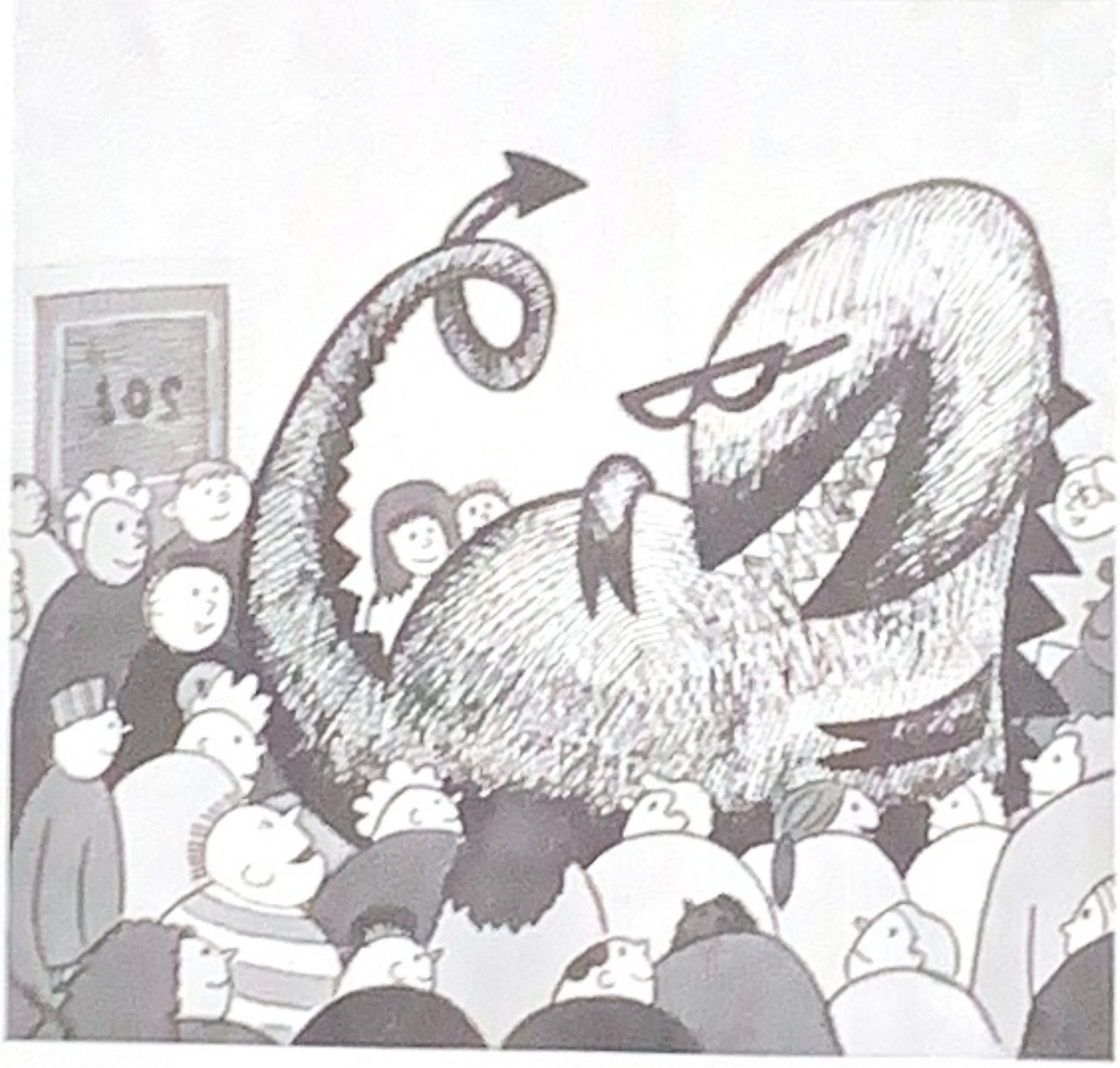
SPORN-O-GRAPHICS

An animation newsletter from Michael Sporn Animation Inc.



IN THIS ISSUE:

An Interview with Tissa David, Animator of The Marzipan Pig

Caleb Sampson on Composing Music for Animation

Cel Prices Skyrocket at Summer Auctions

PLUS ... Upcoming Screenings, Events, Releases and Videos

Vol. 1

Issue 1

October

1991

INTRODUCTION

Hello.

This publication has a twofold purpose. It's designed to give those involved with our studio, MICHAEL SPORN ANIMATION, a chance to voice their opinions to the world. Rather than settle for the prescribed credit they're given, which whisks by in 30 seconds or fewer, they now can tell you their names and tell you what they think about animation filmmaking. The editors, musicians, designers; the actors, animators, colorists, and coordinators will have a small forum to address the problems of their craft. Hopefully, most of it will be interesting.

Since it is being wholly financed by MSA Inc., it will obviously talk about our work, but it isn't meant completely as a piece of self promotion. We solicit articles by anyone working in the field, and hope that it will act as a new venue for those who are would like to have their thoughts printed.

Our mailing list is limited to our sources. If you know of those who might like receiving future copies, let us know. If you'd like to be taken off the mailing list, let us know.

Michael Sporn

SPORN-O-GRAPHICS

Volume 1, Issue 1 October 1991

In This Issue...

Interview 2
Tissa David Talks Animation

Feature 4
Writing Music for Animation
by Caleb Sampson, Composer

Storyboard 6
Upcoming releases, viewings & videos

Characters 8
Beastly News about Greg Perler

Coming Attractions 8
What's ahead on cable & in the theaters

Releases 10
PBS Airs *The Emperor's New Clothes*

Festivals 11

Interview 13
Colorful Remarks by Steve Macquignon

Checklist 16
Cel Sales Swell at Summer Auctions

Editor-in-chief ..... Denise Gonzalez
Design/Production ..... Russ Adams
SPORN-O-GRAPHICS is a quarterly newsletter produced by Michael Sporn Animation, Inc., 632 Broadway, New York, New York, 10012. Subscriptions are available for $8.00 per year. Please send check or money order to the above address. Copyright © 1991. All rights reserved.

An Interview with Tissa David, Animator of *The Marzipan Pig*

Interview by Esther McGowan

EM: From the vantage point of an animator, what makes the story interesting?

TD: The different personalities of the characters, combined with the story, makes this book a gem for an animator.

EM: When you are developing a scene, do you usually act it out to get a feel for the movement?

TD: No, I never act out anything. First of all, it will always be wrong because you will never do it naturally. I never know what will happen in a scene ahead of time. I know what should happen, and what the story calls for. It will happen as I am going on, but how it will happen is just as much a surprise to me as to anyone else. I find out the personalities of the characters in a few scenes and then I let them go the way they feel like.

EM: Did the voice of Tim Curry, who narrates the story, influence your character design?

TD: Yes. Tim Curry influenced everything. The reading of the story is what gave me the desire to do the film. When Michael Sporn gave me the soundtrack in March I may have listened to it maybe 100 times. For weeks I was always playing that soundtrack. And the whole thing accumulates in you and it gives you more and more desire to do it.

EM: The scene in the film where the mouse is wearing a flower and dancing — the drawings are beautiful. Are you a dancer?

TD: I am not only not a dancer but I've never danced in my life. But I'm quite an effective animator when it comes to dancing. But my dances are not correct. For example there is a great animator named Art Babbitt. In the film "Raggedy Ann and Andy" he drew the camel, and the camel dances and it is very correct dancing. He can make dances so that you can learn how to do the dance. Now if I drew the camel dancing, he would just be faking it.

EM: For this project, the budget is relatively low. Does this inhibit you as an animator?

TD: It does not inhibit me at all. I love simplicity in animation. Even if I had a high budget I would do simple animation. There is a big dancing scene at the end with the mouse, who is in front of the mirror. And there is nothing more murderous than to do a character with a mirror image. The mouse and her image are there, but you can only see pieces of the image; I have a foreground that covers it up. Sometimes you will see a tail and sometimes an arm. so I didn't waste a week figuring out the mirror image. These are tricks I would do even if I had a very high budget.

EM: Since you designed the storyboard and the characters as well as animating the entire film — how do you work with Michael?

TD: Very well. I love all of Michael's films and he always starts with a great soundtrack. And to me that is the most inspiring thing. And I love to see what he will do with the rest of the film after my part is finished. It is always a lovely surprise. ■

Writing Music for Animation

by Caleb Sampson

Following are some of the most frequently asked questions I receive about film scoring and my answers.

Do you have your own studio?

I have an 8-track recording studio in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Especially for electronically-based musicians, having your own studio makes life infinitely easier!

What instruments do you play?

I was trained as a pianist, and currently use a combination of analog, digital and sampling synthesizers (Korg M-1, Casio FZ-1, Roland D-50, Yamaha DX-7, Ensoniq Mirage, Emulator SP-12), as well as piano.

Do you use a computer?

I use an IBM PC. Most musicians use the more sophisticated Macintosh, but I have used the IBM since 1984 and am happy with it. I have a general philosophy about technology which: the simpler, the better. The less I have to think about technical procedures, the more I can think about the music itself.

How do you write music using a computer?

The simplest way is to play a piano keyboard while the computer program is in "record" mode. It will remember what you play and play it back for you. Then you can add other musical parts to the original and the computer

will assign them to different sounds on the synthesizers, creating any "orchestration" desired. The advantage of the computer is that once you have "recorded" the piece, you have unlimited editing capabilities. You can transpose keys, rearrange structure, speed up or slow down sections, change notes, etc. When working with film, this is immensely helpful, as the structure or length of the film may change several times up to the last moment.

How do you write music for film?

I work best if I have a videotape of the film (in progress, usually) or an audiotape of the dialogue. I simply watch or listen and play along; I can instinctively tell when an approach is working, and then it's a matter of developing the idea into a full-fledged score.

How do you get the music to match up with the picture?

Many film composers use SMPTE, a video-audio timing system which locks a computer's "clock" to time code recorded on video. I sometimes use this system when there are situations which need very precise timing, but in general I use an "eyeball" approach, where I sync sound and picture by watching the picture with the music playing and altering tempos or note placement to make it work. After having done it for years, it comes very easily.

Which comes first, the film or the music?

In general, the film dictates the structure of the music, unless the music is a preconceived song or dance, in which case the filmmaker must structure his/her action to the music.

continued on page 15

STORYBOARDS

The Studio currently has several projects in the works and for the folks at 632 Broadway this has been one hectic summer. In addition to the staff animators, Michael has commissioned freelance animators, many of whom are out of state.. The balance have been put to work in the studio, leaving not one single empty chair. Everybody is working on **JAZZTIME TALE**, an original half hour program that will air the weekend of November 2 (check local listings) on the PBS series *Long Ago And Far Away*. The spirit of 1919 New York is truly captured with the story of Lucinda and Rose, two young girls from opposite ends of the city whose lifelong friendship begins on a very special night. It is on this particular night that legendary jazz musician "Fats" Waller will make his first public performance on an organ at a local movie theater.

JAZZTIME TALE is narrated by Ruby Dee (star of Spike Lee's *Jungle Fever*) and features an original jazz soundtrack by composer David Evans. Michael Sporn's watercolor styling combined with an original script from Maxine Fisher will magically transport children and adults back to a time when the city was alive with vibrant color and the birth of jazz was just around the corner.

Following JAZZTIME TALE is a half hour musical adaptation of Bernard Waber's **IRA SLEEPS OVER** scheduled to air on HBO November 1991. Ira has been invited to sleep at his best friend Reggie's house for the very first time. He is happy and excited but those feelings quickly turn to anxiety when his sister asks "Are you bringing your teddy bear along?" Ira, never having thought about it, starts thinking about it. Poor Ira, his sister teases and teases him about how much Reggie will laugh. His parents say he'll understand. Only Ira can make the decision.

SPORN-O-GRAPHICS

An excellent cast and production team have been brought together. Danny Gerard (CBS's *Brooklyn Bridge*) heads the cast as Ira, with Grace Johnston (*Beaches* and *One Good Cop*) as his "evil" sister. Songs were composed by William Finn with musical arrangement by Michael Starobin.

Robert Louis Stevenson's **CHILD'S GARDEN OF VERSES** will be produced on film in a half hour animated musical adaptation for HBO. The original screenplay is by Thomas Meehan with music by Broadway composer Charles Strouse. The studio is in early production though *Miss Saigon's* Jonathan Pryce has been cast as the narrator Robert Louis Stevenson.

In the video stores be sure to look for a very special two cassette series of many well known and not so well known children's poetry and nursery rhymes.

NONSENSE AND LULLABYES: POEMS is a collection of fifteen children's poems that have been brought to life through animation. Each is its own separate story individually narrated by some of today's favorite actors. The collection includes favorite poems such as Edward Lear's THE OWL AND THE PUSSYCAT and Robert Louis Stevenson's AUTUMN FIRES. New titles such as Jack Prelutsky's CREATURE IN THE CLASSROOM and Russell Hoban's HOMEWORK are self-explanatory. THE BOGEYMAN is guaranteed to cause a few chills with a trip into a dark basement, while MR. NOBODY and WRIMPLES tells us who causes those annoying little problems at home.

NONSENSE AND LULLABYES: NURSERY RHYMES is a collection of eighteen nursery rhymes given new life with a modernized touch in its animation. Classics such as SOLOMON GRUNDY and THE HOUSE THAT JACK BUILT are

conginued on page 14

From Michael to Mickey: Greg Perler Reports from the Dizzying Heights of Disney Studios

Greg Perler is a film editor who has worked for several years in New York City on a number of independent film projects. Among these projects was an extended relationship with Michael Sporn Animation, Inc. He has recently moved to Los Angeles where he is now working on the new Disney feature BEAUTY AND THE BEAST. There are obviously many differences between working for a large corporation and a small independent one. We were interested to hear his comments on the subject so we asked.

"I am presently working on BEAUTY AND THE BEAST. One of the biggest differences between working here as opposed to an independent studio is the number of people involved in the project. When I worked at Michael Sporn's, Michael was able to oversee every aspect of the film from script and storyboard, to editing and distribution. Here the production is very fragmented within the editing team itself. I had become used to working alone using my own ideas and Michael's vision of the completed film to guide my work. I now work with a number of people, all of whom have their own ideas. We put things together as we think best and only when we are finished do we show it to the producers for approval. This separation from the producers and directors is an enormous difference.

"The other major difference is the budget. My previous strategy was to ask myself, 'How can I achieve what we want with what we have?' It is strangely difficult to get used to the resources I now have available to me after having spent so much time making do with the minimum."

Greg Perler has been in L.A. since June, 1990. His work can be seen in "HUNTING OF THE SNARK," "ABEL'S ISLAND," "LYLE, LYLE CROCODILE" and "SANTA BEAR'S HIGH FLYIN' ADVENTURE." His live action work includes "DEF BY TEMPTATION," "SANTA FOR HIRE" and a number of documentary projects. ■

COMING ATTRACTIONS

On HBO:

October: *The Marzipan Pig**
Dig from Hubley Studios

November: *Ira Sleeps Over**

On PBS:

Long Ago And Far Away

October: *The Emperor's New Clothes**

November: *Jazztime Tale**
Merlin and the Magic Dragon
Hungarian Folktale

December: *Abel's Island**
The Man Who Planted Trees
Bill and Bunny

* Michael Sporn films

In the theaters:

It looks like a holiday season is still for kids, as this Thanksgiving brings us two new animated feature length films. Universal Studios will be releasing Steven Spielbergs's **AN AMERICAN TALE TWO: Fievel Goes West**, November 26.

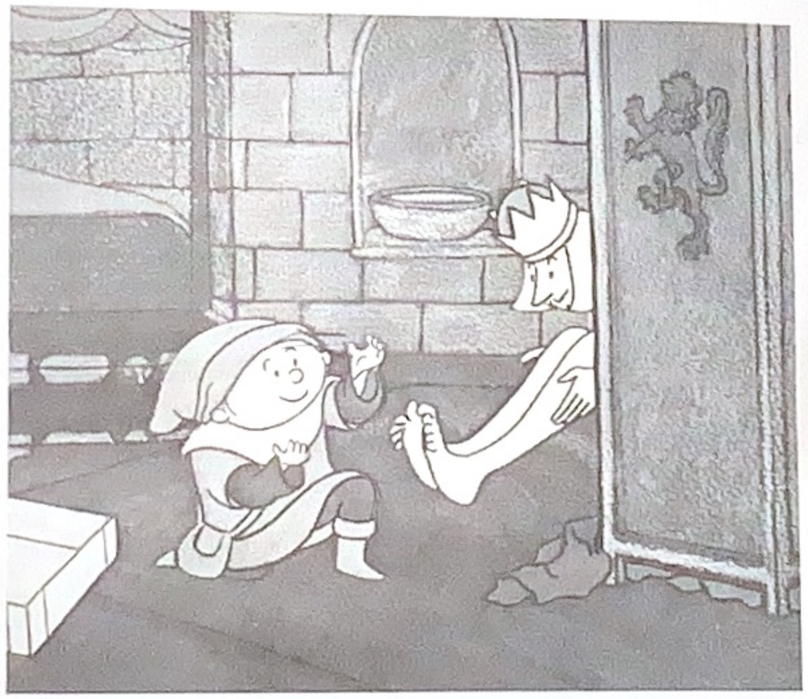
The Disney Studio will be releasing the long awaited **BEAUTY AND THE BEAST** sometime in November. This film will feature the editing skills of Sporn Animation's Greg Perler.

RELEASES

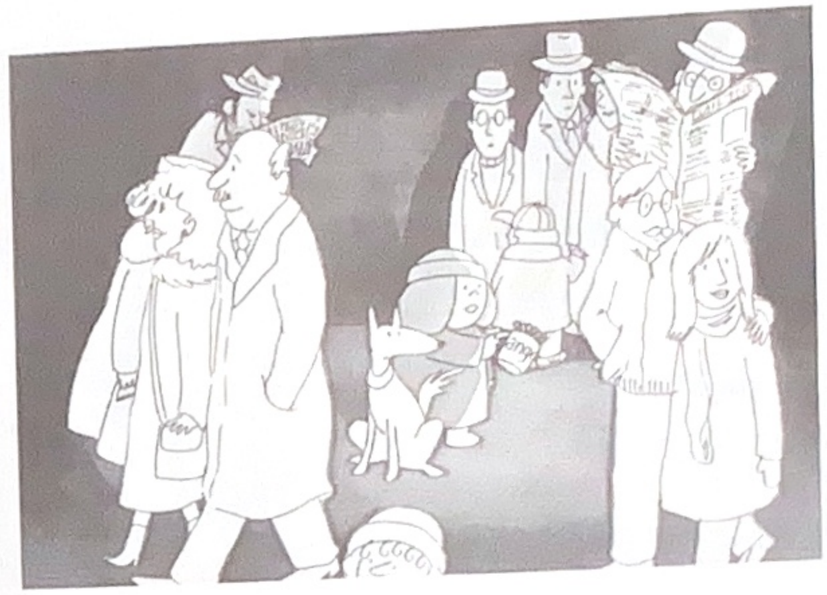
THE EMPEROR'S NEW CLOTHES Set to Air on PBS

Michael Sporn Animation, Inc. has recently completed production of **THE EMPEROR'S NEW CLOTHES**. This film is scheduled to air the weekend of October 19 (check local listings) on the PBS series *Long Ago And Far Away*. The classic Hans Christian Andersen tale, adapted for the screen by Maxine Fisher, is the ever popular story of the greedy Emperor whose vanity and lust for beautiful clothing keeps his subjects burdened with unreasonable taxes. It will take a tailor, a very special suit, and a child to turn his world around.

The all-star cast features Barnard Hughes, Peggy Cass, Courtney Vance and Regis Philbin as the Emperor. Together with an original musical score by composer Caleb Sampson, **THE EMPEROR'S NEW CLOTHES** is told a bold new way. ■

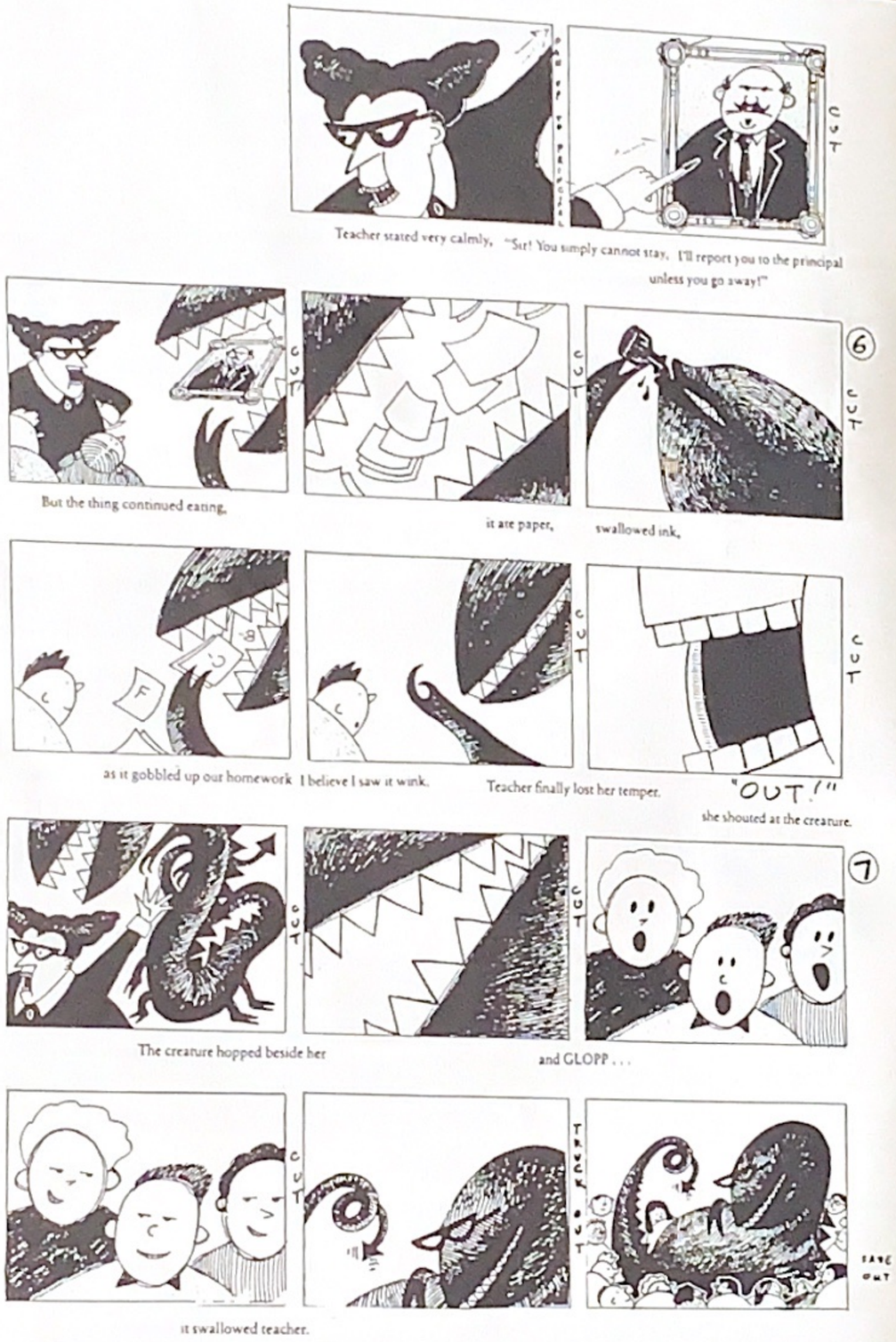


FESTIVALS



It's that time of year again when filmmakers must rummage through their list of titles and choose their best works to enter into the multitude of festivals being held around the country. The Sporn studio has entered three films which recently aired on PBS/HBO. **THE MARZIPAN PIG**, the beautifully animated version of the Russell Hoban book, has already won best film of the year at the ASIFA East Animation Festival and has been entered in a number of festivals. This film is narrated by Tim Curry (*Rocky Horror Picture Show*) and has been credited by Scott Blakey (*Daily News*) as one of the finest children's videos ever made.

THE LITTLE MATCH GIRL, which aired on HBO this past December, has been entered in The L.A. Animation Celebration and has been accepted for screening and final judging. This program has also been entered in The 13th Annual ACE Awards which honors cable television's best. This original version of the Hans Christian Andersen classic is set in 1999 New York and is narrated by Academy Award winner F. Murray Abraham. ■


Teacher stated very calmly, "Sir! You simply cannot stay. I'll report you to the principal unless you go away!"
But the thing continued eating,
it ate paper,
swallowed ink,
as it gobbled up our homework
I believe I saw it wink.
Teacher finally lost her temper.
"OUT!"
she shouted at the creature.
The creature hopped beside her
and GLOPP . . .
it swallowed teacher.

Storyboard by Jason McDonald from *Nonsense & Lullabyes*

INTERVJEW

Stephen Macquignon: MSA's Color Stylist Remarks on His Work

What makes the style of the type of films you do here different from the type other studios do?

We work in magic markers and they work in cel vinyl. Our films are colored on paper, rather than cel, and each colored paper drawing is cut out and pasted to cel. This helps us imitate the style of other illustrators when we're adapting a children's book to film. The marker gives our films a soft look rather than the harsh opaque look of other films.

Why do you use magic markers instead of water colors?

It's a lot easier to control. You have one magic marker and, since you don't need to use a brush, the colors stay consistent.

By using magic markers, doesn't it cause problems? For instance, doesn't it flash around the screen a lot?

It does do that, unfortunately, but with practice you can get it pretty stable. Ultimately, you get a lot more texture by using the markers and paper.

Do you always use the same paper?

Actually the paper changes. Each time we buy reams of paper, we have to watch out for which one bleeds more and how the magic marker is affected. We used different color paper for JAZZTIME TALE such as pink and blue and green. This changed the colors of the markers drastically. We had to make up new color swatches to see how each color was affected by the colors of the paper.

continued on next page

Is it unusual to do the backgrounds before the ink & paint?
It's not unusual for us. I like working that way, myself. Especially with original films. Since there is no picturebook, it's nice to have an idea where the colors are going.

Is a film like JAZZTIME TALE more difficult since the style is specifically designed for that film?
No, it's about the same. It's just different. Instead of trying to match colors, it's creating new colors.

How do you get the ink lines on the paper?
Two ways: we can xerox a pencil or ink the line onto paper; or we can xerox the original drawings.

Have you ever worked with cel vinyl, typical cartoon color?
Yes, on a couple of films, SANTA BEAR'S HIGH FLYING ADVENTURE and an educational for Crest.

Which do you prefer?
I prefer marker over cel. It's different, more creative; it sets you apart from everybody else. Most people use cel but we use markers and people say "Wow!" ■

Storyboards *continued from page 6*
updated with new twists. THE CROOKED MAN is downright new wave, while WYNKEN BLYNKEN AND NOD remains the gentle lullabye it is. THE QUEEN OF HEARTS brings us into the police files for mug shots, and THE BOY AND THE WOLF tells the timeless tale from the point of view of a sheep.

The narration for each series of poems is read by the actors: KAREN ALLEN, ELI WALLACH, LINDA HUNT, COURTNEY VANCE, HEIDI STALLINGS and PHILLIP SCHOPPER. The music and songs are by Caleb Sampson. ■

Writing Music for Animation *continued from page 5*

Do you use live musicians?

I use other musicians wherever I feel like it is going to make a major improvement in the music. For example, I would use a saxophone player for an extended solo part, because you are looking for a spontaneity and expression only a live performance can give. Often, I use a combination of live and electronic music to combine the benefits of both.

How do you get work?

The large majority of my work comes initially through word-of-mouth, and then through maintaining a relationship with a production company or independent producer.

What kind of work are you currently doing?

I seem to have gravitated towards working with animators, which had led me to working on children's/educational films. In addition to scoring five of Michael Sporn's recent films, I have been working for Sesame Street, PBS, MTV, American School Publishers and Macmillan, as well as various "commercial" producers. I have recently scored independent animated films by Flip Johnson, Amy Kravitz and Julie Zammarchi. Also, I compose for dance companies in New York and Boston, and create sound environments for museums and outdoor installations.

Do you enjoy this kind of work?

I love it! I enjoy challenging myself within different musical settings, as it keeps my own creativity fresh. I have been very fortunate to work with filmmakers whose work I admire, so I find both the personal and artistic rewards very satisfying. ■

CHECKLIST

Let's See... At $88,000 for 1/24th of a Second, That's $7.6 Billion an Hour... Hey, Michael, How 'Bout a Raise?

Animation art is big business these days. Both Sotheby's and Christie's auction houses held auctions this past summer of animation cels in New York City. Sotheby's sale on June 18 netted $835,725, roughly $100,000 more than estimated, while Christie's auction two days later brought in $1.3 million, around $200,000 more than the high presale estimate. Some notable prices were:

- $88,000 for a 1950 cel of Cinderella dancing by a fountain;
- $79,200 for a 1951 "Alice in Wonderland" cel;
- $24,200 for a cover scene of the Christie's catalogue featuring Bart Simpson auctioning his sister;
- two scenes from "A Charlie Brown Christmas" (1965) sold for $34,100 and $27,500;
- a 1991 cel of Bugs Bunny against the Warner Brother's emblem brought $8,250;
- and, finally, an *Entertainment Tonight* segment in July revealed that a recent sale of a cel of the Wicked Witch from "Sleeping Beauty" brought in $121,000.

The Sotheby's sale of *Roger Rabbit* cels in June of 1989 brought such prices as $10,500 for 4 cels of Jessica and the weasels. Perhaps *Entertainment Tonight* has it right when they predict a sale price of $1million within the next year. ■

Bugs Bunny TM ©PPC

The Great Cel-Out

Do you like the stories you've seen from Michael Sporn studios? Now is your chance to own a piece of the action!

Just write down the name of the film you like and the name of the character(s) and scene you want below. Make out a check or money order for $33.00 per cel, and send it with this page to the following address:

Michael Sporn Animation, Inc.
632 Broadway
New York, NY 10012
attn: Cel-Out

Within 4 weeks you'll receive a handsomely matted cel.
(Note: if your name and address are not on the mailing label on the back of this page, please include them with your order.)

Film: _____

Character/Scene: _____

_____

_____

Film: _____

Character/Scene: _____

_____

_____

Film: _____

Character/Scene: _____

_____

_____

- Michael Sporn Animation, Inc.
632 Broadway
New York, NY 10012

[redacted]
1b Ave
, NY 11205